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Keeping it clean

with Bill Dodds



FOR RELEASE: January 8, 1973

An ash factory...

Hamilton has a new ash factory, now operating at half capacity so any mechanical bugs can be worked out.

That's right an ash factory-- it's the best way to describe the city's up-to-date approach to incineration.

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The city decided on this method of waste disposal to deal with a garbage problem, because of the usual difficulties-- high land costs, community opposition, etc.-- that face urban sanitary landfill.

But the East Hamilton solid waste reduction unit, or SWARU as they call it, was designed as an industrial plant rather than as an incinerator.

Trucks dump raw refuse in a pit-- 600 tons a day when it gets up to peak operating capacity-- where conveyer belts take over. The belts feed refuse to a grinder, where large metal objects are rejected and stored for sale as scrap. The pulverized refuse from the grinder is sorted magnetically to provide more scrap metal for sale.

Then the fine-ground waste is fed to two furnaces equipped with efficient air pollution controls. Here it burns down to 10 percent of its original volume-- a substantial reduction in the amount of waste for which a landfill site must be provided.

And here another byproduct is produced, one that should help offset the

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operating costs of the unit.

Both furnaces are equipped with boilers which produce steam to power steam turbines which drive in-plant equipment. In addition, the steam heats the unit and controls exhaust gas temperatures for efficient air pollution control.

And there is still steam left over that can be sold to other plants in the immediate area.

So there are two byproducts-- metal and steam-- for sale.

Now if the city can only find a market for the ash which is its main product from the unit....

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FOR RELEASE: January 15, 1973

A light look...

The Chickasaw Environmental Association in Memphis recently ran through a novel experiment in pollution control.

They chose three streams and fed 1,000 milligrams of Vitamin C to one, 500 grams of aspirin to another and an inert placebo to a third.

After 50 days, samples from each stream were tested and no change was noticed in any of them.

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I have a feeling the whole operation was tongue-in-cheek, because the group's conclusion was, "river pollution may be harder to cure than the common cold."

It almost looks like the silly season is upon us, because another U.S. group announced the results of playing with auto statistics.

A motor vehicle survey in the states revealed that each car on the road in 1940 contained 3.2 people. In 1950, that had declined to 2.1 and by 1960 to 1.4.

By projecting this decline rate to 1980, they reached the conclusion that every third car on the road will have nobody in it.

However there are still some people who are turning their imagination to serious work. The U.S. national highway research program has financed a study on the potential use of domestic and industrial waste as aggregate for road construction.

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The sheer bulk of aggregate needed for North America's massive highways programs makes the idea of using waste attractive, and zoning restrictions, rising land values and pollution controls are cutting into existing sources of aggregate supply.

Over the next year or so, a Pennsylvania firm will study the possibilities of using such things as incinerator ash, mine tailings, refinery slag and boiler slag for road construction.

Since road construction and waste are usually both heaviest in heavily populated areas where conventional aggregates like gravel are in short supply, the study has interesting possibilities.

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FOR RELEASE: January 22, 1973

A delicate subject...

I want to approach you-- especially those who have new-born children-- on matters of some delicacy.

You see, some of the conveniences offered to young parents are causing problems here and there.

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Some disposable diapers carry misleading trade names-- names like flush-away and others. Now if that's what's on the package, you expect, that when you change the baby, to dispose of the soiled, wet diaper the obvious way.

You take it to the bathroom, drop it in the bowl and push the lever to flush the problem away-- Right?

Wrong! You may be rid of the problem, but your neighborhood sewage treatment plant isn't.

The diaper can get caught on a burr or a root in a sewage line and cause a blockage. If it's bad enough, the sewer backs up.

Public works and sewage treatment engineers discussed the problem at a conference not too long ago. They said women are the worst offenders.

But it's not a woman's fault if nobody tells her otherwise, they concluded.

There's just no need for it. If you use disposable diapers, you can put them out in the garbage after rinsing them.

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The engineers were even more concerned about cellulose items-- in particular cigarette filters and tampons-- that find their way down the bowl into the sewers.

The cellulose doesn't break down. Even small gobs can jam up pumps. Then the pumps have to be taken apart for cleaning.

It's even worse when the gobs of cellulose accumulate in the treatment areas of the plant. They have to be removed by hand.

And that is not pleasant work.

It would be nice if the manufacturers of these convenience goods had enough foresight to print warnings on the packages telling you to watch where you dispose of them.

But since they don't, I thought I'd better pass it on to you.

I'm sure you will be careful in future.

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FOR RELEASE: January 30, 1973

Throwaway lines...

In the U.S., close to 2.5 billion steel cans will be pulled from municipal garbage by magnets in 16 centres across the country.

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That's three times the number reclaimed in 1971.

Four markets have been found for the reclaimed metal:

The steel industry remelts cans for use in new steel.

The copper firms use them to precipitate copper from low grade ore.

Other centres recover 7.5 pounds of tin coating for every ton of steel cans.

Alloy manufacturers use scrap cans with silicon and manganese for melting and casting purposes.

It's developing into a business reclaiming goods that would otherwise disappear for good in the waste stream.

But the simplest solution to waste overload is to keep the containers and packages that enclose almost everything we buy from entering the garbage flow.

A task force established by Ontario Ministry of the Environment is well into nine months of intensive study of waste problems. One of the challenges it faces is finding ways to direct goods into a reuse cycle instead of the dead-end path of throwaways.

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One area under close examination is beverage containers. When you finish your soft drink, beer, ale, wine or liquor, what happens to the container.

The trend over the past few years has been definitely towards more and more throwaways.

That means, with cans for example, that steel, tin and aluminum are disappearing into sanitary landfills where there recovery becomes a practical impossibility.

And that's not all that's lost.

Glass, tin, steel and aluminum all consume energy in their production. In the case of the metals, more energy disappears into the process of forming -them into containers.

And our neighbors in the U.S. are in the midst of an energy crisis. Can we, in a society whose health depends on energy and the exploitation of resources, afford to spend this energy inefficiently?

It is a matter of practical experience that one reusable bottle can be used an average of 20 times. That's one container doing the work of 20 throwaways.

Of course glass is not the only material suitable for reusable containers. You have only to look at the milk industry to see that. There, plastic jugs are reused. As far as that goes, one of the oldest reusable containers in North America has to be the milk can. Not the little one you buy in the store, but the big one the farmers used to put out for the dairy pickup. They are still around. Boutiques paint flowers on old ones and sell them at outrageous prices.

Next week we'll talk about some of the options in government action that could reverse the trend to throwaways.

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FOR RELEASE: February 5, 1973

Three options...

A working group under Environment Ontario's solid waste task force has been assigned to investigate beverage packaging.

Environment Minister James Auld, outlining the objectives of this study to a press conference, said there is no intention of picking on this particular industry.

It's one of several starting points in dealing with waste problems-- " a matter of attacking the more visual and obvious products of a throwaway society first," he explained.

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In its simplest terms, the container you buy, empty and discard is a convenience item. It's convenient for you and for the seller, distributor and manufacturer who do not have to handle returns and refund deposits.

But it is not a convenience for society. We all have to pay the costs on handling an increasing garbage load. We all have to pay the price of aesthetic degradation when throwaway containers and wrappers are discarded as litter.

It's just not fair that we should all pay for the convenience of the people who want to use throwaways.

Mr. Auld has given the task force a position paper prepared by waste management staff. It outlines three options for dealing with containers for soft drinks, beer, ale, wine and spirits.

One method is, quite simply, an outright ban on non-reusable containers. This is drastic medicine with obvious and far reaching effects on the industry and the community.

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It is so drastic that any actual implementation of this measure would have to be staged over a number of years to ease the impact.

Another method is now in use in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. This would require a refund on all types of containers whether they are reusable or not. Some steps would have to be taken to make sure that distributors and retailers were required to give a refund. It might also be necessary to set up return depots.

Another method would set a minimum deposit level on reusable containers-- a deposit high enough to encourage people to return them. Coupled with this would be a disposal levy on non-reusable containers, so that people who want throwaway convenience would have to pay extra for it.

This levy could be applied to improving waste disposal facilities and research into reclamation of wastes.

The Ontario Soft Drink Association has already made a proposal to Mr. Auld that comes remarkably close to this last option.

The task force, when it concludes its study of these options this spring, may recommend action on one or it may find another solution.

One thing is certain. The Ministry of the Environment is determined to reverse our gradual slide into a throwaway society.

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FOR RELEASE: February 12, 1973

Silly season so soon?...

In the dead of summer, when hard news falls off and everyone who makes interesting feature material is out of town, comes the time known as the silly season.

That's when newspapers and magazines reach for the ridiculous to entertain their readers. It must have come early this year.

I just heard that horses used for logging in the immediate area of Oregon's Bull Run Reservoir, are wearing diapers. The diapers are to keep the animals from fouling the watershed when they feel a call of nature.

You see, they have to use horses to log in that particular area. The machines that are used generally in the logging industry tend to churn up the earth and horses don't.

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With diapers on the horses, the soil and the water quality are not disturbed.

Our Oregon correspondent forgot to ask them, but I'll bet that the horses are disturbed by the whole embarrassing thing.

On the other hand, the diaper approach might solve some of the controversy that keeps cropping up in cities like Toronto over dogs.

You can count on regular complaints in the letters to the editor columns from people who object to having their front lawns used as public canine conveniences.

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And there is a real hostility to people who walk their dogs to neighbors lawns.

It's solid enough for Tom Hughes of the Ontario Humane Society to take an editorial stand in the society publication Animals Voice. His plea is to animal owners to curb their pets and keep them from being a nuisance, solving problems without legislation.

In Britain, legislation has been passed requiring dog owners to remove what his dog leaves behind. In some U.S. cities, the owner is required to grab his dog and thrust the offending end in the direction of the gutter when an offense is imminent.

I'd hate to see that happen in Ontario. We have enough serious things to take care of in restoring and protecting the air, land and water.

But Keeping it Clean has been serious for the past few weeks. It's time to look at the light side.

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FOR RELEASE: February 20, 1973

Is it worth it?...

I was talking with four attractive young housewives a few days ago, all of them deeply involved in the Unionville recycling depot.

Once a week, with the assistance of about 20 other volunteers, they open the doors of a two-car garage on Main Street. And a steady stream of cars from around town and from other communities -- Thornhill, Stoufville, Markham -- pull up in front of the doors. The drivers unload bundles of paper, and cartons of bottles and cans.

They get more paper than anything else -- about six to eight tons a month. When they have enough material for a truckload, they have a market for it.

Working on a limited scale, with volunteer labor, they have made a successful recycling operation -- successful enough so that groups in other communities in the area are thinking about depots of their own.

At this point, they are taking stock of what they have accomplished and asking "Where do we go from here?"

It's not an easy question to answer. They have toyed with the idea of separate collection, but, as one volunteer said, "We get a much better quality garbage with the depot." And she's right. People willing to deliver their separated waste to a depot are willing to take the time and separate it properly.

They have taken some steps to approach their regional government to develop municipal involvement but this is just a start in this direction.

And there's one question that, I think, comes sooner or later to any volunteer engaged in recycling -- Is it worthwhile?

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A certain amount of realistic pessimism has to develop as a volunteer learns of experiments in municipal garbage grinding with mechanical separation of the components of waste, and as he studies the relative costs of recycling and disposal methods.

And if discouragement sets in, the inevitable conclusion is that the volunteer project is a dead-end street.

But the point to remember is that it becomes a dead-end street only when you stop. Recycling is a new frontier in which economics are not the only factor. We're just starting to explore the paths to lead our society out of a cycle of waste and we need all the explorers and pioneers we can get.

One involved person can start a group. One involved group can start others.

If enough of us get involved, we can win.

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FOR RELEASE: February 26, 1973

Capital assistance...

A few weeks ago, Environment Minister James Auld announced that Environment Ontario was raising the 50 percent ceiling on subsidies for capital construction of water and sewage works to 75 percent.

The announcement explained that this would bring the cost of sewage and water works within the financial grasp of smaller municipalities. But I would like to go into detail on how the average homeowner in a community affected by this changed grant structure would benefit.

First of all, speaking in terms of present needs in existing communities, this change could involve 50 sewage works and 29 water works programs. Over five years, the Ministry expects to spend $95.7 million on subsidies-- $27.7 million more than would have been spent under the 50 percent grant structure.

Westport, a village in the Rideau Lakes north of Kingston, is one of the communities to benefit from the subsidy increase. Sewage works worth $1,037,496 and water works worth $564,508 are now under way.

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With no provincial subsidy at all, the construction of these works would cost the average Westport homeowner $666.72 a year for the next 40 years. He might pay this through higher taxes or through higher service rates, but one way or another, he would have to pay or do without the improved water supply and sewage treatment he needs.

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In 1969, a subsidy program was introduced to keep capital costs to the average homeowner down to $120 per year for sewage service and $100 for water service. Under these grants, Mr. Average of Westport's annual capital cost would be cut to $342.48.

But this year, when the ceiling was raised to 75 percent, Westport qualified for a 67.3 percent grant for sewage works and a 62.4 percent grant for water works. When the ceiling was raised, the homeowner charge objectives were adjusted to $130 and $110 for sewage and water works.

And the annual capital cost that will be charged against Mr. Average's tax bill or his service rates for these facilities will be $241.32.

The purpose of the whole grant structure is simple. It's set up to make sure that facilities essential for health and environmental protection are provided at a cost the citizen of the smaller communities can afford.

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FOR RELEASE: March 5, 1973

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A look at air...

Air pollution is a bad thing.

Nobody argues with that statement any more. But do we all have the same reasons for making it? I doubt it.

To an environmentalist, the major issue might be the long-term effect of emitted pollution on the atmosphere -- possibly an increase or decrease of gases that could bring back the ice age or cause the melting of the polar ice cap and the inundation of much of our land.

The transportation authorities see air pollution as a factor in reduced visibility -- in its simpliest terms, a cloud of smoke from a roadside fire that can cause an auto accident.

The naturalist looks at pollution's effects on plant or animal life, possibly a factor that can lead to the extinction of a species.

To an engineer, air pollution is a cost and depreciation factor -- the reason a building must be cleaned every 10 years and the matter of budgeting for a 0.5 percent wasteage of bridge steel every year.

But the factor most of us consider when we think about air pollution can't be treated as an engineering expense -- human health cannot be written off as a budget item. We would be outraged at the suggestion that a few deaths could be counterbalanced by a budgetary saving on pollution controls.

Air quality standards in Ontario are set to keep pollution levels low. That's deliberate. We can't base pollution control on how much an average healthy person can take because there are a great many of us who are not average.

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The standards have to protect the most susceptible.

They deal in terms of parts per million, even parts per billion. Picture it this way. Stand on a scale and pick up a postage stamp. You just increased your weight by one part per million. Now with 1,000 people in the scale and that one postage stamp, you have an increase of 1 part per billion.

That's precision measuring.

Of course the technology that provides this sort of precision for measuring and for control is one of the factors that has caused a general and consistent improvement in air quality in Ontario over the past few years.

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FOR RELEASE: March 12, 1973

Who cares?....

Two out of three Canadians are concerned about pollution and litter, according to a recent consumer survey conducted by the Travel Industry Association of Canada.

This is, of course, an industry with a vital interest in a clean, attractive and healthy environment. If pollution and litter detract from Canada's reputation as a nice place to visit, it discourages tourists, conventions and other visitors from coming back. And this takes income, not just from one industry, but indirectly from all of us.

But this interest in a clean environment is not uniform across the country. Attitudes in Quebec showed only 55 percent of the population are concerned. In the prairie provinces, the percentage was only 57. In Ontario and the rest of the nation, 76 percent of us care.

The survey also showed that interest in the environment increases with education -- 80 percent of the university-schooled were concerned.

But almost half of the people under 20 showed a surprising disinterest. That bothers me. We've come a long way in improving our environment in Ontario. We can't sit back and let apathy grow in our young people -- the people who will eventually inherit our responsibilities.

It's a problem in education.

We have to get the message through to the children -- and the remaining adults -- who aren't interested.

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Of course government must take an active role in public education. Environment Ontario has an extensive education program under way -- a program that will continue and grow.

And more and more teachers in our schools are becoming concerned about environmental issues and are working to pass this concern on to their students.

But it would help a great deal if those of us who are parents took the time to see for ourselves that our own children care.

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FOR RELEASE: March 19, 1973

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On thin ice...

If you were ice fishing on Crystal Lake in the Fenelon Falls area this winter, don't count on a warm welcome if you go back next year.

The cottagers association has just finished cleaning up the lake and according to association president Ken Bradshaw, they are fed up with ice fishermen.

They collected 100 piles of garbage-- some in plastic bags, but most of it loose and frozen into the ice.

Also frozen in the ice, they found 50 piles of human waste.

There were several piles of ashes from garbage, paper and heating fires.

And they recovered 180 whiskey, beer and wine bottles-- a farewell gift from the drinking winter sportsmen on the lake.

The really amazing thing is that all this garbage was left by the users of 13 ice huts.

It goes without saying, these ice fishermen were all strangers to the association. None of them had cottages on the lake.

Non of them would have to live this summer with the mess they left behind over the winter.

Mr. Bradshaw says the association is mad. They won't stand for any more

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of this. Now they are determined to ban ice-fishing from Crystal Lake.

Who can blame them?

The sad thing is that this is not an isolated incident. It is repeated over and over on lakes across the province.

The people who use these lakes in summer, when all the waste from winter washes ashore, are finding there is a limit to their patience.

The Ministries of the Environment and of Natural Resources are aware of the problem. For the past season, there has been an extensive campaign with public service announcements broadcast across Ontario by Environment Minister James Auld, with newspaper stories and with public education programs on the lakes.

All this has been an appeal for the co-operation of winter sportsmen-- An appeal for them to clean up after themselves.

We'll know soon just how well it has succeeded.

One thing we do know-- on Crystal Lake, it failed.

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FOR RELEASE: March 26, 1973.

Yankee go home...

Field and Stream, a U.S. sportsman's magazine that usually shows a real concern for environmental preservation, went off the deep end in its March issue.

Writer Roger Betz praises walleye fishing in Ontario. That's fine. It encourages good fishermen to come here and try their luck, and fishermen are usually the pleasantest and neatest tourists we get in Ontario.

But Mr. Betz suggest in his article one method of creating a walleye "hotspot" that is not only undesirable and unsanitary, it's illegal.

He tells fishermen to bring a case of dog food with them and on the first day of a week-long fishing trip, drop punctured cans in bunches in likely spots. By the end of the week, he claims, this will attract the small fish on which walleye prey.

I won't comment on the effectiveness of this as a fishing method.

But I can tell you what some of the effects will be.

First, we have the bottom of a lake littered with punctured, rusting cans full of rotting dog food. As the food rots, the process

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of decomposition takes oxygen from the water. Enough of this type of fishing, and a lake with a limited oxygen supply can be depleted to the point where its fish die for lack of oxygen.

There are the bacteria involved in this decompostion. If the dog food hot spot is close to a cottager's water intake, that cottage's drinking water is no longer safe.

Dog food is usually rich in oils--a little taste of rancid oil in water goes a long, long way. The swimmer or cottager who gets a mouthful won't forget it quickly.

As decomposition advances in a can, the methane gas generated pops it to the surface. It's a hazard to boats, water skiers and swimmers alike. And rusting cans full of rotting dog food do little for the view or for the air as they wash onto the beach.

For the past year, Environment Ontario has been working to discourage littering. I think we're getting somewhere with controlling litter.

Certainly the last thing we need is to have a major publication print an article that actively recommends a water-polluting form of litter.

By the way, just in case the chance of improving your catch of fish is more important than the environment to you, throwing cans of any sort into a lake is illegal. Anyone caught doing it is liable to prosecution and a heavy fine upon conviction.

So don't try it yourself.

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FOR RELEASE: April 9, 1973

Listen hear...

"God is a first-rate acoustical engineer. We have been more inept."

The speaker was composer Harry Freedman, one of four panelists at a Town Hall meeting on noise in Toronto's St. Lawrence Centre.

He explained:

"It's interesting to consider that while the voice can be raised to quite a loud level, at no time can it be raised beyond the level where it might endanger the ear."

He described the electronic amplifier as "a potentially lethal weapon."

His comments and the meeting followed Environment Minister James Auld's announcement in London last month of noise regulations for Ontario which go into effect starting this year.

Studies indicate that noise levels in urban centres are doubling every decade, and the Ministry is becoming increasingly concerned about the effects of prolonged exposure to a noisy environment.

There are several broad categories of noise sources: Vehicular traffic, aircraft and railroad traffic, stationary sources-- this includes not only factories and businesses but air conditioners and other home conveniences like power mowers and kitchen appliances, nuisance noises and recreational devices.

The first major step in control in Ontario will be the regulation of the operational noises of individual vehicles.

That phrase operational noise covers more than the accessory trade-- the loud mufflers young hot-rodders buy to give their cars the sound of power.

It also covers the way you drive your car. If you race your engine through the gears, your tires screaming through a tight turn, you might find a policeman flagging you down for a noise violation.

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More than five percent of the drivers on our roads are in for trouble under the new noise regulations if they don't mend their ways.

The stationary noises and those recreational vehicles-- snowmobiles for instance-- are also in line for controls.

If we work at it, maybe we can get some peace and quiet around here.

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FOR RELEASE: April 12, 1973

The waste land....

There are estimates in some quarters that our garbage output in North America will triple over the next 30 years, unless something is done about it.

Of course you could look at that prediction as good news-- an optimistic note for the future of our economy. That's one of the sad things about our society. Our prosperity can be measured by the amount we throw away.

In underdeveloped countries, the garbage output is about two pounds per person per day. In Canada, our personal daily output of waste is about four pounds on the average.

I say on the average because a number of studies have shown that an affluent suburb produces more waste than a less privileged neighborhood.

At Environment Ontario we would like to spoil that handy little economic barometer. Instead of measuring our wealth in terms of our trash, we would like to break the throwaway cycle and put some of that waste to work.

Less waste might even lead us to more prosperity.

One plan being followed in Ontario is cutting off waste at the source, encouraging reusable containers and cutting down on throwaway packaging.

Another is the reclamation of material and energy from waste. Environment Minister James Auld announced last week that he plans an experimental pilot plant in recycling. This is being discussed with Metropolitan Toronto and Environment Canada has been invited to take part in the experiment.

In addition, the waste management branch is conducting two studies this year on using waste as an energy source. One involves using ground garbage as a fuel additive in cement kilns and another proposes using it with coal or oil to produce electricity.

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Waste management right now is in a position similar to that of water and sewage treatment 20 years ago, Mr. Auld said. He expects equally successful results from similar measures.

For some time Environment Ontario has been encouraging waste management planning with 50 percent provincial grants for area studies. There are seven of these studies under way and more about to begin.

The next step, which Environment Ontario hopes to start soon, is the provision of provincial loans to municipalities for capital expenditures resulting from the implementation of these area studies. This would be similar to the provincial loans now provided for sewage treatment plants.

All in all, the opportunities for improving waste management now are too good to waste.

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FOR RELEASE: April 16, 1973

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Decibel points...

Noise is measured in decibels.

For the purpose of controlling noise and minimizing the irritation and even emotional and physical damage it causes people, we measure sound in terms of decibels on the A scale (DbA). This is the scale that covers the range of frequencies heard by the human ear.

The threshold of hearing-- the sound you barely catch-- is one decibel. A rustling leaf is 10, a quiet house is 20 and a soft whisper 30.

A conversation between two people involves 50 to 60 decibels. A private car runs at 70 decidels and the sound of a busy street is 80 decibels.

Of course traffic noise is not the only factor on busy streets. When Toronto shut down Yonge street to convert it last year to a temporary summer pedestrian mall, the noise levels rose, with the additional sound from people walking and talking, from loudspeakers turned out to pour music on the street and from the clinking of glasses and mugs.

As we approach 90 decibels-- the sound of a heavy truck, we near the danger area where prolonged exposure can affect human hearing. This range covers noise levels up to 120 decibels-- the sound from a propellor aircraft just over 50 yards away.

As sound approaches the racket of a rivet gun-- 130 decibels-- it crosses the pain threshold and a jet engine at about 25 yards reaches 140 decibels of audible sound that is really felt.

There aren't many of us exposed to jet engines at these distances, so possibly this source as a contributor to deafness is not relevant to everyday life.

But there are other sources that are. At one rock concert, the music was measured at 120 decibels directly in front of the bandstand and 108 decibels on the dance floor.

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Permanent hearing losses of up to 50 decibels have been measured in one five-man group, all less than 23 years old. This is the expected normal loss of hearing for a 60-year-old man. In a year or so as musicians, this group wound up with retirement-age ears.

A few years ago, in one Canadian city, a medical health officer noticed a considerable amount of hearing loss among children of 12. By 1970, it was discovered that 5 percent of the 12-year-olds, 14 percent of the 15-year-olds and 20 percent of the 18-year-olds have defective hearing.

Voluntarily adding noise to the sound intensities that are imposed on us in our environment without our consent can be dangerous.

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FOR RELEASE: April 23, 1972

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All at sea...

Remember the Manhattan, that 1,005-foot $43 million ice-breaking oil tanker that was built for a U.S. oil company to ply the arctic waters above Canada's north shores.

Remember how she needed the Canadian ice-breaker the John A. MacDonald to break through the masses of ice jamming the northwest passage.

A minor rupture and oil leak during her shake-down cruise, and the difficulties the heavy ice created for her 150,000 tons and her 43,000 horsepower turned the tide on the Manhattan.

Instead of tankers carrying oil from Alaska to the eastern seaboard, North America has a new pipeline debate-- pipelines to carry oil across the permafrost region to its markets.

And, according to a U.S. environmental writer, the Manhattan has become one of the world's unique examples of recycling as she sits in Bangladesh's Cittagong harbor-- used as a grain silo.

Two researchers are developing a 12-year old-idea to assess the practicability of getting fresh clean water from the other pole.

Neil Ostrander and John Hult, funded by a U.S. National Science Foundation Grant, propose self-propelled floating nuclear power stations that carry and run huge electrical engines on an antarctic iceberg.

They feel these bergs, which average a thickness of 300 yards and an area of from 10 to 25 square miles, can be driven to arid coastal countries by atomic power.

They envision an iceberg train, towed by a locomotive berg with atomic powerplant, floating to the point where it is needed.

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There quarrying machinery would grind the ice into some of the earth's purest water and pipe it ashore.

Technology should be ready to cope with this project by 1980, but there are still bugs in the proposal.

These include the loss of mass in the antarctic and its effect on the Antarctic Ocean and the fog and cold water runoff that would accompany the ice train.

And a major difficulty is the doubtful ability of the water-poor coastal nations, like Mexico, Chile, Israel and Arabia to name a few, to create farming areas and aqueducts and irrigation networks to use a sudden abundance of water.

It's just part of the challenge we all face-- to learn to use our environment instead of abusing it.

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FOR RELEASE: May 1, 1973

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The envirobuck...

There's money to be made out of environmental issues. But I wish there were more people trying to make money out of solving ecological problems and fewer trying to hustle a buck through exploiting them.

For example, The Save Our Earth Watch. The ad says "Time is running out....If you really care, show the world." You are supposed to send the maker $20 for his watch. Can you really accept this as a genuine contribution to environmental protection? I can't.

Then there are the posters, the T-shirts, the silkscreened art prints, the buttons and all the other things you can buy for hanging, wearing, or whatever as an expression of commitment. If you think buying this stuff is a valuable personal contribution to the world's salvation, maybe you should be committed.

Everybody's jumping on the clean earth bandwagon and it's time some of the freeloading riders were pushed off.

The company or association that makes loud noises about recycling, but doesn't take any active part in reclamation is grabbing a free ride on the bandwagon.

It's time for this sort of commercial environmentalist to put his money where his mouth is.

If he does, he's entitled to claim credit for it. The stationery supplier who deals in recycled paper has a right to make it known. So is the printer who uses that paper.

The bottler who specializes in reusable bottles and sets up his operation to get the maximum rate of return and reuse should tell the world. He's doing his bit to cut down on our waste load and our litter problem.

The manufacturer who assumes the responsibility for setting up a plant that pollutes neither air nor water and pays the cost involved should be recognized publicly and commended.

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But let's watch out for the free riders.

Give credit....but only where credit is due.

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FOR RELEASE: May 7, 1973

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As you sow...

In 1945, some deadly seeds were sown in the Baltic Sea.

They are still bearing fruit.

At the time, Europe was in ruins and the main concern of the victorious allies was to wipe out the instruments of war that had done much to devastate Europe.

The time of war was ended and there was a peace to build. All the world wanted was to obliterate the machinery that battle had created.

So there was no protest when the Soviet command ordered German ships to carry 20,000 tons of Nazi bombs to the deepest part of the Baltic for dumping. This disposal operation continued for three years.

The first crop of this deadly seeding was reaped in April, 1949. Copenhagen doctors treating four cases of food poisoning traced the contamination to a Danish trawler's one catch off the Baltic island of Bornholm.

The trawler's nets had pulled in a mustard gas bomb-- all three crewmen had burns from the caustic oily contents-- and contaminated water from the bomb had touched the fish they were cleaning.

The number of food poisonings continued and increased to the point where the city of Copenhagen banned all sales of cod roe from fish caught in the area of Bornholm.

Between 1968 and 1972, there were 16 reported incidents in which gas bombs were netted in the Baltic, and nobody knows how many similar catches were unreported.

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The Danish authorities assure consumers there is no danger-- that mustard gas cannot pass into the food chain and on to the person who eats fish caught in this area. And as a further precaution, fishing is limited in the hazardous area.

But the burned fishermen are just one example of the dangers that can lie in the deeps when hazardous wastes are dumped in the ocean with no thought for tomorrow.

This and other situations teach a grim lesson. Man's production and wastes are so complex and so fraught with potential for harm, that we must give careful thought to disposal of these wastes.

The things we bury carelessly can rise up to haunt us in the future.

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FOR RELEASE: May 14, 1973.

Nature of things...

A frog who has shed his skin doesn't leave it lying behind.

He eats it.

It seems a shame that creatures so conscientious about litter and pollution should be so threatened by pollution. But they are.

Frogs and the other amphibians of Ontario are efficient and avid killers of insects -- particularly those bugs we regard as pests -- mosquitoes, etc. The good turn they do us in controlling these pests makes them vulnerable. They accumulate great quantities of poisonous insecticides.

While amphibians live a great part of their lives in water they never drink it. Water is absorbed through their skins. This leaves them wide open to poison from pesticides and water pollution.

In addition, man the developer is moving in and destroying the marshy ground that has been their habitat for 340 million years.

That's right - 340 million years.

The frog, the toad, the salamander and their amphibious cousins were the first creatures to venture out of the seas, lakes and rivers to build a life on the land.

Over those millions of years, they've had their enemies - snakes, fish, mammals. But only in the past century has one natural enemy gained the dominance over land and sea that allows him to threaten the very existence of these ancient creatures.

It's taken a long time, but we've finally made it.

It's an achievement of sorts. But it's an offhand achievement -- a byproduct of the way we live rather than a concerted extermination effort. The side effects of human life styles have a much greater impact on endangering species than hunting, for example. Yet when we are stirred to action in the cause of a threatened species, we attack hunting.

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It's a simpler target and we can make the hunter the scapegoat for all our sins. That way, we can continue exploiting and polluting the land, the water and the air with a clear conscience.

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FOR RELEASE: May 22, 1973

Recycling racks...

In Metropolitan Toronto, tiny East York has become the first to make a profit from a recycling operation.

Unlike Toronto and Etobicoke, which offer separate collections of paper, Metro's smallest borough has paper racks installed on all its garbage pickup trucks.

For the citizen interested in recycling, this means he does not have to wait for special pickups, letting paper accumulate for long periods of time. All he has to do is bundle it and put it out beside the rest of the garbage.

About 10 percent of the borough's householders have been doing this and as a result, the borough works department is convinced it turns a bit of profit on the program.

But there are problems ahead if all of Metro gets serious about recycling. If 25 percent of the area's newspapers were recycled, this would flood the paper markets entirely.

On the other hand, a high load of recycling-- 400,000 tons or more a year-- could permit the development of a major de-inking and paper recycling operation by a paper company.

While municipalities have the best chance of making recycling work, some volunteer organizations in the Province are going strong.

The Burlington Citizen's Committee for Pollution Control, for one, is dealing with glass metal and paper by the ton at its recycling centre.

In 1972, the centre recycled 120 tons of glass, 40 tons of metal and 200 tons of paper. The total quantity of material handled doubled the centre's total during 1971.

And the committee is still going strong with recycling, briefs to government, public information and environmental education.

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FOR RELEASE: May 29, 1973

Recycling together...

To make a success of a recycling operation, a volunteer group needs the whole-hearted support of its community and its municipal government, according to two groups who should know.

Burlington's Citizen's Committee for Pollution Control, a volunteer body with a wide range of environmental interests and an extensive recycling project, give a lot of credit to the willing assistance of the Town of Burlington.

"We've been told we should ask for local initiatives grants and government funds," said recycling chairman Angus MacKenzie. "We're interested in doing the job as volunteers."

And the town has backed the project, providing a works department garage it no longer uses. This is the committee's main recycling depot.

In Kanata, a town of 6,000 on the outskirts of Ottawa, Kanata Pollution Probe is enjoying success similar to Burlington's and that group too is enthusiastic about the support from municipal government.

Since 1970, the recycling project there has grown to the point where in 1972, they handled 228 tons of paper alone.

And the group is proud of the success of its glass recycling operation. They use a hand built crusher, assembled by a March Township councillor in the township garage from plans designed by engineering students from a U.S. college.

"We are not suggesting that every municipality start curbside collection of glass," said Mrs. Diana Pilsworth, founder of Kanata Pollution Probe. "You have got to have a market close enough to be practical....But waste management is

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becoming more urgent all the time and we can't just sit around until some total recycling program may be introduced."

Success didn't come easy in either Kanata or Burlington. It takes enthusiasm and hard work to get things rolling and municipal officials have many responsibilities that can keep them from embracing the problems that fledgeling recycling operations can bring.

But in Kanata, the township is assuming full operating responsibility for curbside collection of paper and glass and for the glass recycling station established by the volunteers.

And in both Kanata and Burlington, the volunteers responsible for the recycling programs feel it has been worth the time and effort.

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FOR RELEASE: June 4, 1973

Scattering poison...

Not long ago, a homeowner, fed up with the dogs and cats that visited his garden without invitation, scattered mothballs around his property.

Somebody told him this was an effective animal repellent. Certainly it's something quite a few people try.

But children aren't repelled by the smell of mothballs and on this occasion, a toddler picked up one of the mothballs, put it in his mouth and sucked it.

That child was very ill.

I'm sure that homeowner would not dream of leaving poison around his house where children can get into it. I'm sure that none of us, if we thought about it, would leave poison scattered around our property where it can endanger a child.

I'm asking you to think about it.

Mothballs are made to kill moths, not to repel animals. There are sprays and chemicals on the market for that purpose. They do the job and don't pose any threat to humans.

Pesticides and repellents are designed for specific purposes and are meant to be used only for those purposes. The instructions on the container spell out the uses for any given chemical. Any other use not covered in these instructions is illegal.

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The use of mothballs as an animal repellent is a violation of the Environmental Protection Act and the Pesticides Control Act. Any misuse or improper application of any chemical to control pests is illegal.

There are stories, and lots of them, about the tragic results of improper use of pesticides.

Remember. These products are poisons. They are carefully developed for specific purposes. And they fulfill these purposes well when they are used properly.

But please don't underestimate the dangers involved in abusing them.

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FOR RELEASE: June 12, 1973

Northern lights...

From Sudbury, there's some bright spots in the news.

This month marked the official opening of a new water pollution control plant. It's a milestone for the whole province, because it means that every city in Ontario now has sewage treatment.

Of course that doesn't say the water pollution control job is done. There is room for improvement in the treatment facilities of some communities and there are still smaller centres working for treatment of their wastes.

And Ontario has a commitment to complete phosphorus removal facilities to improve the water quality of the Great Lakes. This program is well under way here, but the U.S. still needs encouragement to live up to its side of the bargain on the southern shores of the Great Lakes.

The plant in Sudbury, a $6.5 million installation, since last December when it started operating, has been contributing to the improvement of land around the city as well as to the improvement of the water.

Sludge from the treatment plant is being used by the International Nickel Company of Canada Ltd. to mix with sterile mine tailings to produce arable soil. With this sludge, grass is growing on barren land.

This use for sludge eliminates a disposal problem that can be a headache for treatment plants in other communities.

On the land not yet restored to grassland, INCO has a dust control program under way. The company is spraying a glue-like chemical mixed with water from a small plane onto the dusty tailings. This chemical binds the

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soil from blowing away and yet forms a membrane porous enough to let water soak through. The company is confident it can restore the barren land and this program controls dust until the reclamation work can begin.

They describe it as an experimental treatment which is most effective where tailings top out like snowdrifts.

In two days, the spray plane applied almost 18 tons of the chemical, to more than 40 acres of tailings.

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FOR RELEASE: June 18, 1973

Fuels rush in...

In Japan, which now has the world's largest steel company, government research is under way on a nuclear-powered steel mill.

The purpose is to develop a high-temperature reactor that will provide heat, replacing the conventional blast furnace or open furnace of conventional steel-making processes. Success will mean an end of the dust and particulate emissions and the gases like oxides of sulphur that create pollution control problems for conventional mills.

On the other hand, nuclear plants develop environmental problems of their own-- radioactive waste disposal and heat pollution to name a couple.

But success in the experiment could mean direct industrial use of nuclear power to ease the demand for diminishing supplies of non-renewable fuel resources.

It has already been suggested that the steelmaking reactor's spare heat could be put to use in a chemical-petrochemical manufacturing complex.

To pick the other extreme in heat sources, voices are being raised, particularly in northern Ontario, urging a return to wider use of wood as heating fuel.

Their arguments are reasonable, a well maintained woodlot, with constant replanting of harvested firewood, is a perpetual source of renewable fuel supply.

In a U.S. government-supported experiment near Buffalo, a new process is being tested to draw gases from the pyrolysis of solid waste. Garbage is

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heated to 3,000 degrees in the absence of oxygen and the gases drawn off for use. The residue can be clean fill for building blocks, highways or landfill. In Hamilton, the heat from the incineration of garbage is used for in-plant heating and the city is looking for nearby buyers of the excess steam heat available at the incinerator.

Environment Ontario is studying the potential use of ground garbage as a fuel additive to supplement existing fuels in producing electricity and in cement kilns.

Around the globe, power sources as sophisticated as the nuclear reactor and as basic as the windmill are being studied and developed to enable man to live in harmony with his environment and within the means of his resources.

In one way or another, heat and energy are basic requirements of our society. Our future depends on where we get these essentials and how we use them.

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FOR RELEASE: June 26, 1973

Straight goods...

Straight Goods III, the third annual youth conference sponsored by the Ministry of the Environment, will give 300 students from across Ontario a chance to get the lowdown on environmental issues.

University of Western Ontario plays host to this year's sessions August 26-29. At the university, the secondary school delegates will have unlimited access to more than 50 resource people-- representatives from government, industry and education and private groups, all prepared to explain issues.

This is the year of the energy crisis-- real or imagined-- and representatives of the producers and consumers of energy will be under fire on a special energy day at the conference.

Straight Goods is not set up to present information in a take-it-or-leave-it package. While there are scheduled sessions, the theme of the conference is dialogue with dialogue, discussion and out-and-out argument wherever a group of students find one or more resource people.

This year's conference has been expanded to a full three-day program on the recommendation of students involved in last year's Straight Goods II at Queen's University in Kingston. Laurentian University played host to the first conference in 1971.

John Robarts, former Premier of Ontario, will welcome delegates to his home town of London and officially open the conference.

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Any students planning to attend the conference must be in high school and be planning to return to their schools in the fall, taking with them what they learn.

Application forms, brochures and posters have been distributed to every secondary school in Ontario. The school principals have the details.

It's an exciting opportunity for the student who cares-- the person who wants to explore the environmental issues that will determine so much of his future.

It's a step towards involvement in the issues and the problems they pose.

Young or old, you are part of the problem. Straight Goods III is a step towards becoming part of the solution.

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FOR RELEASE: July 2, 1973

Make it beautiful...

We don't have to commit ourselves to big causes to make our world a better place. The little things we do or don't do can help.

Why not smile a lot? That's a good place to start.

Then pick up some litter and put it in the can. And watch that you don't litter.

Walk to work or ride a bicycle. Or take a bus. The air will be a bit cleaner for it.

Use a hand mower. Power machines are noisy and they pollute-- even the electric ones. Electricity just moves the air pollution farther away to the generating plant.

Save electricity. Turn off lights in empty rooms and use hand-power for eggbeaters and can openers.

Buy refills and shun throwaway containers and gadgets. Take soft drink bottles back to the store and take a bag with you-- excess packaging means more garbage.

Plant a flower.

Make it grow with organic fertilizer. Your own compost heap of leaves and kitchen scraps will help it bloom.

Check your furnace every year to keep it burning cleanly. And burn clean, dry coal and wood in your fireplace. It makes less smoke.

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Keep smiling.

Keep your car clean and quiet. Rotten mufflers are noisy and dangerous. A car in tune starts better, runs better on less fuel and pollutes less.

Honking your horn causes bad vibrations. Save it for when you really need it.

Carry a litterbag and use it-- in the car, in a boat or on a nature trail.

Complain. When industry, government or people are doing wrong or not doing enough, tell them. Write letters to the editor.

Praise. When industry, government or people are doing right by the environment, tell them. A few kind words can make somebody's day.

Be happy. And have a nice day.

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FOR RELEASE: July 9, 1973

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The more things change...

In London, England, a member of the House of Commons stood up to propose a bill banning traffic from the heart of the city.

His arguments were eloquent. It was costing the city a fortune to clean up after the traffic. The air was getting progressively fouler.

There was even some evidence that increased traffic was a contributing factor to some human illnesses.

And the noise was unnerving and disrupting city life.

Sound familiar?

Well, the legislator made his bid for closing the streets before the turn of the century and the traffic he complained about was horse-drawn.

There were real reasons for complaint. Long dresses sweeping the ground were continually getting befouled. The residue from the horse traffic may even have made high button shoes a practical necessity.

Of course, he was laughed out of the House. The horse was indispensible--everyone knew that.

Everyone was wrong. The horse, and the pollution that had to be cleaned up by a man with a shovel and broom, disappeared from the streets with the coming of the automobile.

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Just as the horse was an integral part of urban and rural life in the last century, so, today the automobile is integrated into our lives.

Cars don't pollute the ground. They dump their wastes into the air. But the concentrations of people and cars in urban areas, created in part by the technology that brought us the automobile, have brought the return of traffic pollution problems.

And just as 19th century gadgeteers tried to develop mechanisms to catch the pollution from the oat-burners, so today, the gadgeteers are churning out add-on devices to trap the wastes from gasoline burners.

Has anything really changed?

Maybe the final answer will be a new transportation and cultural revolution just as drastic as that brought about by the automobile.

And who knows what pollution problems that will bring.

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FOR RELEASE: July 16, 1973

Composting for beginners...

Lawn trimmings, fallen leaves and kitchen wastes can make up as much as 20 percent of our municipal solid waste problem.

Some of us have to pay directly to have these carted away. This cost is still there for those of us who have municipal garbage collection. It's just hidden in our tax bill.

Did it ever strike you that this is unnatural? Every other living entity on the face of the earth contributes its substance and its wastes to the common resource pool for all life. Only man buries his wastes and makes them unavailable.

Our systems of disposing of sewage and waste were developed as a result of concentration of population. And they were developed with the goals of disease prevention and a pleasanter immediate environment.

But our society is maturing now and we are beginning to learn a bit more about our wastes. Part of this learning is a rediscovery-- the realization that treated sewage sludge and properly composted wastes can be put to good use instead of being dumped in a safe, out-of-the-way place.

One way we can put our wastes to good use on an individual level is through composting.

Kitchen wastes, dead leaves and lawn trimmings are good raw material to start with.

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The simplest compost heap is just a pile of these materials in an out-of-the-way corner of the yard. All the real work is done by worms, mold and the bacteria normally found in the soil.

The pile can be made more attractive by keeping it in an open slat bin or barrel and can be covered to prevent excessive moisture. It should be turned every week or so to ensure even decomposition. And covering and regular turning help prevent odor problems.

Within two months, or at most six months, the composting is complete and the mixture is clean, stable and ready for use.

It's not a complete fertilizer, but it is a useful soil conditioner for working into gardens and around the roots of trees and shrubs for healthier growth.

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FOR RELEASE: July 23, 1973

People watching...

According to the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, birds and animals are a lot more observant than people realize.

There's a healthy duck population on the 500-acre lake at the authority's Orangeville reservoir. It was quite a sight when the then-Department of Lands and Forests opened the area to controlled hunting for eight weeks.

Every morning when the gates were opened to hunters, the authority staff there were amused to see the ducks move out of range en masse. They just flew down the lake into the sanctuary area and stayed there until dusk made it difficult to sight a gun.

And as night fell, they commuted back to their feeding grounds among the hunters' duck blinds. Their success was impressive. During the 1972 hunting season, in eight weeks, 187 hunters got only 34 ducks.

The Canada geese at the reservoir, while protected by the game laws, weren't taking any chances. Every day at dawn, they flew across the lake into a cemetery and rested among solid protecting tombstones until the hunters left.

Like the ducks and geese, I plan to do some people watching. Keeping it Clean will be missing for the next couple of weeks while I take my wife and children camping.

On our last trip we were disturbed by the amount of litter and general sloppiness of some of the people on the road in vacation country.

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When we return, I'll let you know if things have improved.

Since my last camping trip through Northern Ontario, a lot of private and government effort has been put into persuading people that personal environmental cleanliness is important.

When I get back, I'll be ready to give some opinions on how successful we've been.

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FOR RELEASE: August 13, 1973

Rainbow country....

Rocks, trees and water--you couldn't imagine there would be so many ways to combine them in a landscape.

You couldn't imagine that they could be so beautiful.

But they are. For the past two weeks in northern Ontario, I've been making that discovery all over again.

When I was young, I had an art teacher who was intoxicated with the Group of Seven. Tom Thomson, A.Y. Jackson--They were supposed to be the greatest and they left me cold.

I'd look at their paintings and they were fantasy. I just couldn't believe that they were real. And I had no use for them until my first trip to the areas they painted. Then it finally dawned on me what the paintings were saying.

Of course there are no soft drinks cans, cigarette butts or candy wrappers scattered over the landscape in A.Y. Jackson's paintings. But a lot of tourists and holiday travellers have covered the ground since he passed through.

Some litterbugs really work at it. I was walking through one provincial park and spotted a few styrofoam coffee cups on the park trail. The closest place to buy coffee to go was a good 10 miles away. Now that's what I call dedicated trash spreading.

In the same park, I found beer bottle caps on our campsite. All of them had been carefully hammered flat, then left lying on the ground. Provincial parks here are very well equipped with handy trash cans for every campsite. There's really no excuse for not using these containers.

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But all in all, the countryside seemed just a little bit neater. Maybe more of us are getting the message and using trash containers and litter bags. Heaven knows the message has been repeated in our ears often enough.

Litter breeds more litter. If there is already junk on the ground, we don't feel quite so bad about adding to the mess.

In some areas that is how garbage dumps, with all the attendant dangers of rats, open burning and potential for disease, begin.

The first bit of trash left leads to a second, then a third. When enough accumulates, people just accept the spot as a dump and use it for their garbage.

Fortunately, garbage dumps are on their way out in Ontario. On the road, you see more and more dumps closing to be replaced by sanitary landfill sites, operated in a safe, clean and unobtrusive manner.

If we keep it up, we may get the land back to the state it was in when A.Y. Jackson, Tom Thomson and the others first showed it to the world.

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FOR RELEASE: August 20, 1973



Signs of the times.....

I've seen enough names and messages painted in three-foot letters on roadside rock faces in the past two weeks to last me a lifetime.

Why, on God's earth, would any thinking Christian scrawl messages like "God is Love" and "Jesus is coming again" across the length and breadth of the most beautiful country in the province?

The beauty and love of Creation are there for anyone who has the eyes to see. Defacing all this with dripping brush or spraybomb, even with the best of intentions, is a sin.

And there are hundreds of offenders who don't even have the excuse of good intentions.

Have you seen the trail of the freaks along the trans-Canada highways? They seem to have a new pornography to blow the minds of all the straight people who pass by.--words like pot, grass and acapulco gold. Somehow I don't think they have the same impact as the old reliable four-letter words, but somebody obviously does.

Then there are the lovers, with affairs too big to record on tree trunks or carve into park benches. These Romeos and Juliets need billboard-size exhibits for romance. I wonder what sort of spectacular wedding would be an appropriate follow-up--possibly a nude ceremony on horseback in the median of Highway 400 with a motorcycle gang escort for the honeymoon trip?

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The biggest rock scribbler of them all is the ego-trip man. He leaves his initials and sometimes his name and address everywhere in the biggest, most obvious, way.

Of course he's wide open for the occasional prankster who comes along with a spray gun of his own. I noticed one giant signature on the rocks left by a man from Welland. I don't think he expected the equally large addition to his artwork that indicated he was addicted to abnormal sexual practices.

I must admit there is a certain crude justice in that sort of rock scribbling.

But all these petty painting games are played at our expense. It's just another way for the ignorant and inconsiderate to deface our environment.

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FOR RELEASE: August 27, 1973

Alligator tales....

Jacques Bourque, supervisor of Environment Ontario's training and licensing branch, has a little story in his newsletter for water and sewage treatment operators.

The moral applies to a lot of environmental situations and I thought you might enjoy it.

Spring - 1971:

An operator from a northern Ontario water works, while attending the Basic Water Works Operation course in Toronto, mentioned a problem he was having. His particular municipality was downstream of an Indian reserve and he had been experiencing quite a problem with skinned beaver carcasses becoming stuck in the intake.

The general consensus of those attending the course was that stocking of the river with alligators would solve the problem.

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Spring - 1972:

The unnamed northern Ontario water works operator was back in Toronto attending the Basic Gas Chlorination Workshop. The problem of the beaver carcasses becoming stuck in the intake was revived.

It seems that the alligators that were stocked in the river could not survive the cold northern Ontario waters. A Ministry of Natural Resources employee attending the course mentioned that some of his colleagues had been successful in crossing beaver with alligator resulting in a fur-covered alligator that could survive in northern Ontario water.

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Spring - 1973:

The unnamed northern Ontario water works operator dropped in to our office to pick up some additional course manuals and mentioned that he had an even greater problem. It seems that skinned alligator carcasses are becoming stuck in the water works intake.

It would seem that there is a moral to this story, simply, "look before you leap." It is strongly recommended that you seek professional help before charging off with a possible solution.

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FOR RELEASE: ~~September~~ 6, 1973

Getting straight...

They unfurl their ideals like banners, these young crusaders.

The world is the holy land they want to save.

For three days, the walls of the environmental establishment, held by 60 of its members, were battered by teenage warriors-- the 200 student delegates to Straight Goods III.

Questions, comments, discussions, debate, and outright argument-- high school students joined in a no-holds-barred wrestling match with the issues of environment and energy, sponsored by Environment Ontario and the University of Western Ontario.

They're intelligent, concerned and impatient. And they're individuals with separate personal convictions and identities.

The girl with a conscience argued cut back consumption-- rich nations gobbling up resources-- to leave some share in earth's wealth for the under-priviledged of the world.

The boy who wants action was quick to condemn speakers for "a snow job" and "whitewash". But he went to an energy debate, when what he really wanted was to rap about workable student environmental projects, because it would be-- somehow-- impolite to his hosts not to turn up in the auditorium.

And the couple-- he wants to join Pollution Probe and do something, she thinks they are too radical and activist-- both left the conference determined to do something worthwhile together.

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I'm not saying all the delegates are committed to the cause, but there are a lot of young people who want to play a part in making the world a better place. They see the waste of an affluent society based on a consume and discard philosophy and are ready to try and stem the tide with recycling.

They've heard of pollution. They've been told what is being done to stop it and to repair its damages. But they want to see more accomplished in less time.

And they want to accomplish something themselves-- to throw themselves into the fight. All they ask is for someone to guide them and tell them what to do.

Some of the problems they want to tackle don't have solutions yet. In a few years these same young people may be the ones to find those solutions.

But they are finding ways to contribute now, because they believe what we've all been told: If you're not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

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FOR RELEASE: September 12, 1973

Environment...

I don't like environment.

That's the word I mean--not the thing itself. It used to mean surroundings--a physical milieu. But it has come to mean much more.

The word has an impersonal sound. And it's not supposed to be impersonal. It's a very personal thing.

Your environment is the sum total of creation that has some direct or indirect effect on you, the people you know and see and all the other aspects of existence as they affect you. Environment is the only structuring of the universe that puts you right in the centre.

But you don't get that feeling from the word.

Why? Because it has been used in other places so often that it is not recognizable in its own right.

If you want an example, listen to the lawyer in juvenile court:

"Your honor, the lad did cause a train wreck, but you must remember, he comes from a bad home environment-- culturally deprived, you know."

Or the labor leader:

"We're not just interested in more money, we want a better work environment in this shop or we go out."

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These were uses invented before the environment bandwagon got rolling. Now everyone's exploiting the word. I expect the paranoids to get it any day now. Can't you just hear it?..." Doctor, my environment is plotting against me."

Of course, we could always borrow from the Spaceship Earth concept and call our environment our life-support system. But that sounds too much like playing astronaut. Besides it doesn't cover the full meaning.

How do we describe the universe as it affects the way of life---the quality of life--the very sum total of our existence?

It's environment.

I guess there's no alternative. We have no other word, so we'll have to keep that one and see that it's used properly.

We have to use it properly because our environment is something we depend on-- something we should cherish-- something we must protect.

And how can we do that if we don't realize fully what it really is?

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FOR RELEASE:SEPTEMBER 17, 1973

Somebody's thinking...

Somewhere in the U.S., I'm told, a major defence installation is under way.

Its purpose, in the event of nuclear holocaust, is to direct and co-ordinate the destructive power of submarines capable of mounting atomic attack. To achieve this purpose, it is buried very deeply underground, with an elaborate life-support system, and it is designed to be virtually indestructible.

The contractor involved in this installation has retained an environmental planner so that this project can be completed with minimum disruption to the environment.

There's a note of grim irony there-- the environmental considerations of preparing for annihilation. I suppose it's progress....of a sort.

Then there's the story of the subway contractor in Washington, D.C.

A local health official, after taking careful tests of the air in the tunnel excavations, ordered workmen to the surface. The pollution level in the tunnels was higher than was considered acceptable.

The contractor caught the health official before he left and asked him to test the air at street level, above the excavation.

He did.

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The pollution count was twice as high as it was underground on the job.

And the contractor was left shaking his head and wondering:

"Where do we go from here?"

Sometimes, I wonder too.

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FOR RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 24, 1973

A dubious honor...

UNESCO has announced that international studies show Mexico City as the world's most polluted city.

The United Nations organization reports "air contamination 100 times the tolerable level. Breathing it is equivalent to smoking two packs of cigarettes a day."

The city is in a three-sided natural bowl where wind can enter to clear the air only through passes north of town. This creates problems as a million vehicles, cement factories, oil refineries, steel plants and other industries-- all with limited pollution control, dump 4,000 tons of airborne waste each day.

The altitude-- 7,434 feet above sea level-- means that large doses of ultraviolet radiation act on this pollution to create smog heavy enough to block off the sun at noon.

Mexican government officials, concerned about the growing problems, have set a May, 1974 deadline for the installation of industrial pollution control devices. They have backed the deadline with legislation permitting fines of up to $8,000 for violations.

In Moscow, the concern over vehicle emissions has led to a decision to change over about 35,000 trucks to liquefied petroleum gas fuel, because of its cleaner burning qualities.

And in the U.S., a recent supreme court decision can have significant effects on the practice some industries make of moving to relatively unpolluted

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areas when they are pressed to clean up their operations in heavily polluted locations. The court upheld a lower court decision forbidding substantial degradation of clean air.

For those of you who don't have enough worries, there's a report from Istanbul, Turkey. A professor at the University of Istanbul claims that air pollution in Ankara may be having detrimental effects on men's sex lives.

But the professor would not give a definite opinion on whether a rise in sexual complaints-- particularly impotence-- was caused by air pollution or a psychic response to anxiety stemming from social change.

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FOR RELEASE: OCTOBER 2, 1973

Environmental assessment....

There are four basic principles laid down in the Green Paper on Environmental Assessment released last week by Environment Minister James Auld.

That Ontario needs environmental assessment.

That the public should be involved.

That the public should be informed.

That the cost of assessing the environmental impact of a project should be applied to the cost of the project.

The first principle is a basic assumption. Environment Ontario has developed comprehensive pollution abatement programs and is developing environmental rehabilitation programs. But these deal with existing situations. A wide range of planning and preventive activities must be brought together and supplemented so that an efficient and centralized system can be developed to head off environmental problems while development projects are still on the drawing boards.

This system is called environmental assessment.

Public involvement is essential to make it work. The people who are affected, or whose surroundings are effected by government or private development should take part in any program designed to see that the effects of the project are beneficial.

And the public must be informed... documentation on a proposal should be available for public scrutiny in the very early stages of a development proposal. There are, of course, limited circumstances that would create exceptions to this rule-- for example, situations where full disclosure would not be

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in the public interest, would cause inflation of land or service prices, or would reveal confidential information about industrial processes.

Applying the cost of assessment to the project proposed is simply the fairest way to handle most situations. The agency that proposes a development which could affect the environment should be prepared to pay for the expense involved in avoiding or minimizing any adverse environmental effects from the development. Assessment is not that expensive a process in terms of development costs, and the streamlining that a thorough assessment procedure can bring to the process of government examination and approval could provide real benefit to the proponent of a development in terms of reduced delay.

There have been several systems proposed to meet these basic principles. And these will be debated over the next few months until a final procedure is established.

The important thing about this procedure is that it will give all of us a chance to take part in doing what it says on the licence plate of your car:

Keep Ontario Beautiful.

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October 9, 1972

At Meaford...

The occasion was the official opening of Meaford Water Pollution Control plant, a $1,157,000 sewage treatment plant.

The plant has a design capacity of 860,000 gallons per day, providing primary and secondary treatment to purify the sewage from a community of 4,000 with some commercial and industrial water waste to boot.

The cost was shared between the town and the Provincial government.

It's the first really good sewage treatment system the community has ever had.

And the local pride and confidence in the system is amazing.

On the dignitary stand for the ribbon cutting were, among others, Mayor Donald Ferguson, Environment Minister James Auld and assistant deputy minister D.S. Caverly, who is in charge of water management in Environment Ontario.

The idea was Mayor Ferguson's. In the middle of his speech to about 50 people at the opening, he decided to illustrate the quality of the treatment operation.

So he turned and said: "I now invite Mr. Auld and Mr. Caverly to join me in a glass."

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Plant operator Jim Krieg, with newsreel cameras on his heels, dipped a glass into the outflow channel from the treatment plant and filled it with water.

He passed it up to the Mayor, who raised it to his lips, swallowed and passed it to the other two.

The Mayor and Mr. Caverly tasted it without comment. Mr. Auld sampled it like a wine connoisseur and remarked, "a good body."

It was spur-of-the-moment. It was frivolous.

And it took a certain amount of confidence in the plant and some small bit of nerve.

But that little incident told more about the art of sewage treatment as developed by the Ontario Water Resources Commission in this province and as it is continued by the Ministry of the Environment than any number of speeches.

You can remember that long after you forget the words.

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FOR RELEASE: October 16, 1972

Walk softly...

Walk softly but carry a big stick. That sums up the operational methods of an effective control program.

It's the theory behind pollution control, not just in Ontario, but anywhere in the world where government is serious about environmental protection.

You see, there's a basic difference between protection legislation like The Environmental Protection Act, 1971, and the Criminal Code of Canada and the Highway Traffic Act.

The last two are designed to enforce by prosecution. The first is concerned with getting results.

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Generally speaking, the Ministry of the Environment is not interested in crime and punishment-- collecting fines and sending people to jail.

We've failed if a polluter is fined-- regardless of the size of the fine-- unless he also stops polluting.

Collecting scalps in the courtroom is not nearly as important as making sure what comes out of a factory's chimney stacks and drainpipes is clean and harmless.

And legislation with its prescribed fines is just one of many big sticks.

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It has been used-- Since January 1, this year, 25 offenders in Ontario have been charged under environmental legislation and 22 have been convicted.

But for every one of those court cases, there has been a hundred instances where a water or air pollution problem has been cleaned up quietly and without argument.

If you tell a businessman he's losing money while he's polluting the air or fouling the water and if you can tell him that cleaner, more efficient processes will save him money, he's not going to argue. Especially if you can prove it.

Besides, an industry can gain or lose a lot in terms of public relations and public image by the way it accepts or rejects its responsibilities to the community.

Industries are usually susceptible to the sort of pressures that government and public opinion can bring to bear-- much more susceptible than individuals.

Remember, industries are owned and operated by people.

There are diehards who fight all the way for their claimed right to use the public skies and waters as a private dumping ground.

But there are many more who respect and care for the community where they live and work. When you give them a chance to improve, they take it.

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FOR RELEASE: OCTOBER 22, 1973

That scrap built...

How would you like to live in a $60,000 scrap heap.

It doesn't sound too pleasant, but a metal company put together a very desirable four-bedroom house in a fashionable neighborhood of Richmond, Virginia, using nothing but waste.

The ingredients were; aluminum cans, broken glass, old newspapers, carpet scraps, worn rubber tires, incinerator fly ash and garbage from New York City. The project was started, with the cooperation of about 30 other companies, as a demonstration of the current state of the recycling art.

The materials were chosen in terms of current availability or practical potential for use in the near future. And the builders reported that much of the material and techniques were competitive with traditional building methods.

The aluminum went for joists, framing, trusses and siding-- all in metal reclaimed from beverage cans. Aluminum reclamation saves 95 percent of the energy involved in creating the metal from the ore, bauxite.

The driveway was from crushed glass, bound with an asphalt-like material from reclaimed rubber tires. Crushed glass was also used as fill under the basement, in the basement blocks and insulation, and mixed with quarry tailings in the bricks.

Plywood subflooring, sidewall sheathing and a roof deck, were replaced with board made primarily from recycled newspapers. Scrap wood and sawdust were the raw material for another type of board used for cabinets.

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Carpets were made from reclaimed nylon fibre, over pads made from reclaimed jute sacks. Floor tile was made from reclaimed plastic, mixed with scrap wood chips and aluminum.

Fly ash reclaimed some of the cement in the concrete pourings, marble quarry tailings went into the bathroom fixtures and the lawn was fertilized with garbage compost.

And not a single neighbor complained about all this garbage in the community.

Nobody is claiming that revolution is imminent in the building industry or that all houses should be made of scrap.

But the day is not far distant when many more of the things we use and live with can be made from reclaimed waste.

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FOR RELEASE: October 29, 1973

ENVIRONMENT LIBRARY OF ONTARIO
OCT 26 1973

Walk softly...

"Ecology is pulling up a plant and finding that everything else is attached."

That definition is from pioneer conservationist John Muir. It's a significant reminder that no man is an island and that we must be concerned, in the day-to-day conduct of our business, our pleasure and our lives, with the consequences of our activities.

Consider just our links with the insect world, with honey, silk and shellac all produced by insects. And the countless varieties of plants that depend on insects for reproduction.

There's a simple example from the early days of sheep farming in New Zealand. The farmers found that sheep thrive best on legumes such as clover. So they introduced clover for their grazing herds.

Then they found that the clover would only be grown from imported seed, because it was not being cross-pollenated. So they had to import bumblebees to carry out the work of pollenation to make sheep farming economical.

By our influence on environment, we choose our companions on earth. By dumping untreated wastes in our waters, we drive out the rainbow, the lake trout and the salmon and encourage the catfish, the sucker and the carp.

With our cities, and the wastes they develop, we provide homes for the rat and change racoons and skunks into scavengers.

We've learned all this the hard way - by destroying the natural environment of better companions. Now we're learning to choose our companions by controlling our wastes in the air and water and on the land. And we're also learning to control the location of the sources of those wastes to

minimize their effect on the natural environment.

We've had to learn to consider the consequences of our actions.

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FOR RELEASE: November 5, 1973

Thermal pollution...

Heat pollution is waste heat-- energy that is discharged instead of being used.

With our technological society using massive quantities of energy in such things as nuclear generating stations, the potential harm from waste heat is great. But the potential good-- the chance of using this waste heat-- is even greater.

Scare headlines have predicted that if the Mississippi River were used to cool all the nuclear plants proposed for the central U.S., that giant river would be heated to the boiling point at its mouth.

But the southern U.S. States are semi-tropical compared to most of Canada. Generally speaking, the cooler the climate, the greater the potential for using industrial heat discharge.

In Huntersden, Scotland, for some years flatfish have been raised using water heated by thermal generating plants. Canada is about to start studies this summer in New Brunswick to find similar uses for the hot water discharge of a thermal generating station.

In Lake Ontario, in warm weather, cold water fish avoid the plumes of warm water discharged into the lake. In winter, fish tend to congregate around these sources of warmth. Some industries have to put screens on their water discharges to keep carp and alewives from swimming up the pipes in search of spawning ground.

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The Canada Centre for Inland Waters estimates that man's activities contributes eight per cent of Lake Ontario's heat budget during the coldest weather of the year-- In the winter, additional heat can only help the lake and the organisms in it. Man's heat contribution falls off during the summer months when power consumption is lower.

Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. estimates that four nuclear plants with a total generating capacity of 13,000 megawatts, would keep the St. Lawrence Seaway open until the end of December. Three more would extend the shipping season to the end of January.

What we have to do is find the solutions that turn thermal pollution into energy sources.

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FOR RELEASE: November 12, 1973

For the parents...

When young children are hanging around the house, driving you crazy because they have nothing to do, take a tip from some science teachers.

Show them how to be pollution inspectors.

Take a clean, white cloth, cut it in small pieces and send them out to hang the pieces in a number of locations-- in a tree downwind from your chimney, near the ground and close to the street,from a windowsill. They can collect the pieces a few days later and look through a magnifying glass at what they have collected.

If you have filter papers in your house, coffee-making filters, for instance, suggest that the children tie the filters over the vacuum cleaner hose and switch on the cleaner for a few minutes to sample the air. They can try one filter outside, one inside and another near a dusty surface, and compare the samples.

They can also smear vaseline onto a small area of different windows and compare what collects on the jelly. Or they can put tape, sticky side out, inside and outside, and see what it collects.

All of these experiments are simple ways of sampling dustfall and particulate matter in the air.

In another experiment, old nylon stocking pieces can be stretched across the ends of large empty tins. Make up three tins and put each on its

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side, in a safe place, in a garage, by the street, or along a driveway. Examine them after two weeks, after four weeks, and after 12 weeks and compare them with a square of the original nylon.

The number of broken threads indicates the degree of contamination from hot smoke particles, acid aerosols, nitrogen oxides, solvent vapors and other damaging gases.

Now that they've taken samples and examined them, they can think about sources-- where the dust or gases they have observed come from, and what can be done about them.

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FOR RELEASE: December 5, 1973

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Power to the people...

One of my neighbors wants to buy his wife an electric make-up applicator, manicure and massage kit, the latest bit of power gadgetry on the market.

He's a sucker for gimmicky conveniences and he's got the most-decorated and best-lit Christmas display on the block.

But he's got a problem. If he does get the new gadget, where will he plug it in? He has electric toothbrushes, his and hers electric razors, a hair dryer and an electric hair de-tangler in the bathroom. The bedroom circuits are shared by a clock radio, lamps, television, electric blankets, hair curling set, massage kit, vaporizer and shoe shiner-- all electric.

The rest of the house is the same. The kitchen, aside from the usual power appliances like stove, refrigerator, toaster, mixer, blender, grill and dishwasher has electric frypans, roasters, corn popper, carving knives, can opener and knife sharpener to name a few.

Everything in the house is done with power tools-- housecleaning, washing, lawnmowing, snowshovelling and even drink mixing. Two cars-- both with power steering, brakes, windows and seats share garage space with two snowmobiles and power boat as well as motorbikes for summer. The last I heard, he wants a gasoline-powered pogo stick when they come on the market here.

In his den, when he curls up in front of an electric fire in the imitation-fireplace to listen to his super four channel sound sterio, he curls up in a reclining chair with a power massage built in.

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In a corner, there's an electric exercise-reducing machine because the only energy burned in that house is the kind you buy.

But I've been interested in watching him lately. Not because he's a gross user in the face of an imminent energy crisis. Unless we come to rationing, he's always going to have enough money to buy gasoline and power. He has a good income. The rest of us will go short long before he cuts back.

No, the interesting thing is that his wife is expecting. And my wife and I have a bet on whether the kid will be born with a 110-volt extension cord attached or a tag that reads: "Batteries Not Included."

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FOR RELEASE: November 28, 1973

On a Lake...

A Cottagers association newsletter reached my desk the other day as I returned from a bout with flu.

Its message covered all the things that kept it from being a perfect summer on the lake.

And I suspect the message could apply to hundreds of recreational lakes, so I won't identify the newsletter.

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"In some ways, people let us down," the association said:

--The person who ran a loon down with a boat and killed it.

--The person or persons who dumped a quantity of a detergent-like substance into the lake.

--The boaters who threw garbage into the lake.

--The campers who left their garbage behind.

--The persons who burglarized cottages and the persons who stole gas tanks.

--The persons who committed acts of violence under the influence of drugs or liquor or both.

--The persons who operated boats after dusk without proper lights.

--The trailer park residents who failed to follow health rules in disposing of liquid wastes and garbage.

--The cottagers who pushed logs off their shores to become dangerous boat traffic hazards.

--The water ski enthusiasts who skiied through the narrows and other dangerous places.

The boaters who disregarded their own safety and the safety of others by travelling at excessive speeds through the narrows and other conjested traffic areas.

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--The fishermen who persist in fishing in the narrows and block navigation to other boats.

This is a word-for-word account of one lake's problems.

The association blames two things for these problems--one, the arrogance of yahoos who feel they can get away with this sort of conduct and two, the reluctance of other people to get involved by complaining or reporting the trouble-makers.

If we enjoy our lakes, we have an obligation to protect them. Getting back to nature does not have to mean life among the savages.

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A reader information service, courtesy of the
Ontario Ministry of the Environment.